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ABSTRACT

A general discussion of the nature of ethical values of the specific issues related to teaching such values leads to several specific suggestions as to how to accomplish ethical value education in communication. Ethical values education should be integrated throughout the curriculum of higher education in general and communication education in particular to encourage cultural diversity and pluralism. Specific ethical values can easily be stated in the syllabus, as numerous values are implicit in each discipline, and explained very early in the course. Case studies, writing and speaking assignments, and discussion questions could be used to provoke students' thinking about ethical issues. Additionally, reading lists that reflect a variety of ethical points of view can be used to complement the values of students and instructors and sharpen the analytical skills of both faculty and students. Finally, every university faculty member should receive training in values-added instruction as an aid in design and implementation. (Twenty-four references and an appendix containing possible assignments are attached.) (KEH)

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Ethics In Higher Education

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Ethics in Higher Education

Overview

The Hastings Center (1980) writers indicate the contemporary concerns with teaching ethics as they say, "A rash of recent articles and editorials have called for a central place in the curriculum for an examination of ethical issues. Colleges and professional schools have been urged to worry about the moral and not just the cognitive development of their students" (p. 1). In the wake of insider trading, savings and loan mismanagement, B-2 cost overruns and other scandals, pressure is mounting for professors to focus on ethical concerns relevant to their disciplines.

Unfortunately, as DeMarco and Fox (1986) note, "Practically everyone theorizes about values, and disciplines other than philosophy use moral theories of one kind or another to justify their activities or to resolve problems within their fields (p. 3). Carey (1990), in his article "America, The Incompetent," quotes University of Pennsylvania sociology professor Digby Baltzell as saying, "We have a society that hasn't got [sic] any moral center . . . We tolerate anything (p. 11)" and the late Pulitzer prize-winning historian Barbara Techman echoes, "It does seem that the knowledge of a difference between right and wrong is absent from our society . . . . So remote is the concept that even to speak of right and wrong marks one to the younger generation as old-fashioned, reactionary and out of touch (p. 11)."

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to examine the issues relevant to consideration of ethical values instruction in higher education in general and speech communication in particular. To do so we: (1) discuss what are ethical values; (2) explore what specific issues relate to teaching values in communication courses; and (3) offer specific suggestions as to how to accomplish ethical value education in communication.

What Are Ethical Values?

Johannesen (1983) indicates that, "Values can be viewed as conceptions of

the good or the desirable that motivate human behavior and that function as criteria in our making of choices and judgments." He further states, "Concepts such as material success, individualism, efficiency, thrift, freedom, courage, hard work, prudence, competition, patriotism, compromise, and punctuality all are value standards that have varying degrees of potency in contemporary American culture." Johannesen's notes, "Ethical judgments focus more precisely on degrees of rightness and wrongness in human behavior" (p. 1). Nilsen (1966) augments, "As a subject of study, ethics deals with questions of 'good' and 'bad,' 'right' and 'wrong,' and others that we would call 'right'" (p. 1).

Standards of beliefs such as honesty, truthfulness, fairness, and humanness usually form the basis of making ethical judgments regarding the appropriateness of particular human behaviors. When a public speaker, for example, offers information as fact, seeks to have her or his opinion win assent, or asserts that one course of action is more acceptable than another, there are ethical dimensions present. In fact, whenever behavior involves choices or forms of coercion (physically or psychologically), there are standards applicable of right and wrong in judging the ends and/or means, inherently we have an ethical issue.

Rokeach (1973) indicated that humans are the only animals, ". . . that can be meaningfully described as having values" (p. 12). Having values implies the necessary ingredients for making ethical choices. Could it be that humans are unique in this aspect as well?

DeVito (1988) notes, "To the degree that communication has an effect, it also has an <u>ethical dimension</u> (p. 10). Principles for ethical communication are difficult to formulate. DeVito (1988) continues, "The major determinant of whether communications are ethical or unethical is to be found in the notion of choice and the assumption that people have a right to make their own choices (p. 11). "Unethical communications," writes DeVito, " . . . would be those that force people (1) to make choices they would not normally make,

and/or (2) to decline to make choices they would normally make (p. 12). DeVito concludes, "The ethical communicator, then provides others with the kind of information that is helpful in making their own choices" (p. 12).

Issues

Ethical issues are an inherent part of human communication. The attempt to persuade or influence another is a source for ethical examination. Higher education is an arena that can not be free of consideration for ethical scrutiny. Communication departments, as well, are not exceptions. To communicate in any arena is to select options and to advocate them. Following this line of thought, there can be no value-free communication for anyone.

There are those who would argue for a values-free education as a part of the mission of, among others, regional state universities. To do so, others of us would argue, is to advance a value itself. Can we teach without making ethical judgments? We contend we cannot.

Kidder (1987) indicates that Japanese instructors see a connection between the group spirit of an elementary school classroom and the later loyalty of Japanese workers and executives to their companies. He writes, "It is not the sort of thing that can be conjured up simply with courses in 'ethics' and 'morals'." (p. 3) The teaching of ethics and values must be integrated in the curriculum. The Japanese put significant stress on "moral force of method" -- on doing things the right way for its own sake. Students are encouraged to be persistent, not to get the highest score.

All education, it could be argued, has an <u>unstated curriculum</u>. Unstated values might include preparation for consumption (materialism), competition, and other middle-class values present in the life style of the professor/teacher. Should educators challenge the values and ethical choices of their students? Should they question their own values in classroom discussions? Would doing so be ethical?

The international Pinnacle Group public relations company came up with the following findings in a recent survey of American high school seniors:

59 percent said they would face six months' probation on an illegal deal to make $10 million.

36 percent would plagiarize to pass a test.

67 percent would inflate expense accounts.

50 percent would pad an insurance claim.

66 percent would lie to achieve a business objective.
(School reform and ethics, 1989, p. 18)

Is this not a sorry state of affairs? Perhaps we should not be apologetic for instructing our students that financial success is pointless unless complemented by integrity, honesty, and a deepening sense of quantitative, non-materialistic values.

According to Christian Science Monitor editors (1987, January 30) experts say that values taught in public schools are filtered through two general modes of contemporary thought: cultural relativity and values neutrality. This results in the implication that all concepts of right and wrong, political ideals, forms of behavior, and so forth must be tolerated dispassionately as being equally valid. The individual alone can decide their worth. The vacuum caused by over 20 years of uncertainty about the teaching of values in the public schools (fear of slamming down a ruler in class and saying "That is wrong!"), and the move away from a traditional-values base in the home, is just now being felt. (p. B 1) Can this be correlated with scandals mentioned earlier?

The Hastings Center (1980) cited a 1978 Gallup Poll that found, ". . . 84 percent of public school parents surveyed favored instruction in morality and moral behavior in the schools. Only 12 percent opposed such instruction" (p. 2). There seems to be growing interest and support for integrating more ethical value consideration in our curricula.

Mortimer Adler (1986), as he looked toward the 21st century, was quoted as seeing one of the central issues to be ". . . to challenge, dismantle, and rebuild one of the most solidly entrenched institutions in the nation: the educational establishment." (p. 16). When the institutions of higher

education are rebuilt, what changes need occur to teach ethics and values?

Arnett (1990) argues that the study of communication ethics and free speech is the heart of the disciplinary field of speech communication. He contends:

> Communication ethics assists us in combating the demagoguery of simply asking, "Can it be done?" without the accompanying ethical question, "Should it be done?" which is likely to generate debate. In a time of medical questions of life and death from abortion to euthanasia, we must be wary of easy answers. Just because a politician can discover what the public wants does not necessarily mean that he or she should take such a position. Communication ethics requires asking why, not just how, and free speech necessitates examining perspective. (p. 215)

Debate and questioning assume an ethical commitment to seek truth.

Public Address

If one were to limit speeches to providing information that is helpful in making personal choices would that constitute an ethical standard? What about speakers who present one side only of a persuasive message? Would it be different if the audience had little previous information regarding the topic (few defenses)? What about multiple solutions to an agreed upon problem area where the advantages of one solution are weighed as much stronger than the advantages of other possible solutions (manipulation and/or deception)?

Should our ethics require that persuasive intent and/or potential harms of an action be stated in advance as tobacco products must contain the notation that smoking (or other personal consumption) may be a hazard to your health? For example, should our ethical standard require informing you in advance that "I want you to 'value' ethical training in communication programs" as an ultimate goal of our writing (or sharing orally) this message?

Is it ethical to ghostwrite a speech for another? Would your answer be different if opposing value systems were present -- the presenter asking for a communique that the writer finds in violation of her or his beliefs?

Interpersonal Communication

To the extent that interpersonal communication has an effect, it has an ethical dimension. DeVito (1989) says, "Because communication has consequences, there is a rightness or wrongness aspect to any communication act. (p. 10) If we choose to use another person (manipulate) rather than be dialogic (open) with them regarding our desires for them, do we not cross the line of ethics? Questions such as the following indicate some of the ethical dimensions of interpersonal communication:

Is it ever justified to tell a lie?

Are there "white lies" that are justified?

Are there extreme situations where an omission, if not an outright lie is justified?

Is it ethical to lie to achieve a "greater good" for another?

Is it ethical to tell children stories about the tooth fairy or Santa Claus?

Is it ethical to use primarily fear appeals to persuade another?

Is it ethical to cry or shout in an attempt to convince another?

Is it ever ethical to reveal private information if you were not given permission to do so?

Is violence justified as a response to political oppression?

Nilsen (1966) adds the following: "Is it wrong to tell a lie to avoid hurting someone's feelings? To be honest must we tell the 'whole truth' about what we are describing? If we are trying to sell something, are we obligated to point out its weaknesses as well as strengths so that the buyer can make a more informed and intelligent choice? Are we being honest if we let someone take our statements to mean one thing when we really intend something else? Do we have any obligation to go out of our way to do good or to say the right thing? More fundamentally, do we really know what is good? Why should we be good in the first place? Are there any fundamental reasons why we should be good, apart from the practical one that if we treat others ill, we are more

likely to receive ill treatment in return (p. 1-2). These are the tip of the proverbial iceberg as it were in the ethical considerations raised in teaching communication.

Deetz notes, regarding the "I-it" ethical construct of Buber (1970) that, "Buber is not suggesting by "thouness" that every relationship should move toward intimacy and the disclosure/realization of the other's real self, but that the "realness" of the other is the resistance to fixation." (p. 234).

Bloom (1990) indicates that ethical systems differ gender to gender. She submits that women communicate their morality and ethics in "a different voice" than men. (p. 244) She argues:

> Men develop an ethical system concerned with fairness and based on universal principles, rules, and laws. Moral dilemmas revolve around competing rights. A hierarchical system is created. Relationships are subordinate to rules, and rules are subordinate to universal principles. The overriding concern is "to do the right thing" and "stick to one's principles." Women form an ethical system concerned with responsibility based on caring, empathy, and inclusion. Moral dilemmas are characterized by conflicting responsibilities among a wed of enmeshed relationships rather than the competing right of autonomous individuals. The focus for resolving moral dilemmas is on not hurting anyone, maintaining harmony, and meeting everyone's needs. Thus the female ethical system is more contextual and situational because it places a high value on the relationship. (p. 246)

Any integrated ethical studies program will need to be sensitive to these distinctions.

Organizational Communication

Researchers, Kanter and Mirvis, are quoted in a recent Wall Street Journal as saying that "'43% of America's working population believes in lying, putting on a false face and doing whatever it takes to make a buck' are part of our basic human nature." (May 30, 1989, Labor letter, p. 1).

Pribble (1990) references economist Milton Friedman's philosophy that the only social responsibility of business is to make a profit and that the most important value in evaluating business and its ethics is profit because capitalism is an "indispensable" means of achieving political freedom suggests we have a serious organizational ethical issue.

Deetz (1990) laments:

> In the 750-page Handbook of Interpersonal Communication (Knapp & Miller, 1985), the word "ethical" appears twice and "ethics" does not appear at all. "Influence," "strategy," and "compliance" are used throughout. No discussion of ethics appears in the Handbook of Communication Science (Brger & Chaffee, 1987). Both works are filled with value statements and value judgments, but the nature and foundation of such value claims are rarely raised as social ethical concerns (p. 226).

Should not our student of organizational communication be given more value-based guidance than how lie, make a profit, to gain compliance, influence, and strategize?

Journalism

Ferre' (1990) charged that before their image began to tarnish, many communication professionals demonstrated little or no public concern over ethical responsibilities. He wrote:

> A 1988 Gallup poll reported that only 23 per cent of the public thinks of journalists in positive terms, and that just seven per cent thinks positively of advertising practitioners ("Honesty and Ethical Standards," p. 3). Another 1988 Gallup poll indicated that only about one-third of the public has much confidence in either newspapers or television ("Confidence in Institutions," p. 30). Furthermore, surveys by the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE), Times Mirror, the Gannett Center for Media Studies, and the Los Angeles Times suggest that the public thinks that the media are politically biased, that they

> overemphasize bad news, and that they treat business people and the wealthy too favorably and young people, women, and senior citizens not favorably enough, and that they are out of touch with the concerns of ordinary people (Gaziano, 1988, p. 218).

Ferre', summarizing Niebuhr, indicates that justice is the continuous struggle to increase the power of victimized groups. Further, he indicates, "Justice, to Niebuhr, has two regulative principles: equality and liberty. Equality without liberty leads to tyranny; liberty without equality leads to anarchy." (p. 221) For Ferre' Niebuhr's argument for the for the balance of power in mass media would include "increased federal and state regulation in direct opposition to the present policy of deregulation, which has enhanced the power of industry at the expense of public service". (p. 223)

Radio, Television, and Film

Brown and Singhal (1990) call for teaching prosocial television. They write:

> "Prosocial television can improve the quality of our lives, but if we are to encourage its use, then the responsibility for television content cannot remain on the shoulders of commercial sponsors and networks prone to avoid prosocial programming content, or on government officials who can arbitrarily decide what is prosocial and what is not. The ethical use of media must be based upon the imperative of protecting our freedom, equality, dignity, and physical and psychological well-being. In the case of prosocial television, ultimately, the ethical dilemmas will be decided by television viewers. (p. 277)

Whose ethical values should we teach? (The question is not "if", that can not be avoided.)

Having examined some of the issues regarding teaching ethical values in education in general and specific communication disciplines and subjects in particular, now it seems appropriate to offer some general guidelines.

What Should be Done?

What are the goals in teaching ethical values? Is it to provide training in order that graduates will behave better in their professional lives? Is the goal to introduce a different disciplinary perspective to students? We agree with the Hasting Center (1980) writers in their conclusion to these questions as they write, "We believe that the primary purpose of courses in ethics ought to be to provide students with those concepts and analytical skills that will enable them to grapple with broad ethical theory in attempting to resolve both personal and professional dilemmas, as well as to reflect on the moral issues facing the larger society" (p. 48). However, we do not believe that ethical values education should be limited to a specific course or two. In fact, we believe it should be integrated throughout the curriculum of higher education in particular and in communication education in particular.

Robert Barker (1987) put the matter this way, "Just as we now teach students to write 'across the curriculum,' we must encourage students to consider the ethical and social implications of all that they know and are able to do." (Christian Science Monitor, January 30)

We believe that ethical values should be taught to encourage cultural diversity and pluralism. We do not hold to the notion of one, official morality for everyone; rather, we recommend that educators present multiple considerations of what is just and right in given case studies. We believe, ultimately, that all moral decisions should remain with the students. While we may believe in several absolutes ourselves, we believe more strongly in diversity and pluralism as values and as ways of valuing in our society. Critical inquiry and self-awareness are important considerations. We do not favor either religious or political indoctrination.

We believe that human beings are of intrinsic worth endowed with a capacity for reason, for understanding, and response. While affirming there are some absolutes, persons should have the maximum opportunity for self-determination as long as the rights of others are not injured. We agree with

Nilsen (1966) when he argues for a concept of the good, " . . . whatever develops, enlarges, enhances human personalities is good; whatever restricts, degrades, or injures human personalities is bad" (p. 9). Teaching students to seek the good should be a goal of education.

Implementation

How can this be accomplished? We believe that specific ethical values should be stated in the syllabus and explained very early in the course. Reading lists that reflect a variety of ethical points of view can complement the values of students and instructors and sharpen the analytical skills of both faculty and students.

What could or should teaching in ethics accomplish? Courses in ethics should be designed to make it clear: (1) that there are ethical problems in personal and civic life; (2) that how they are understood and responded to can make a difference to each person and situation; and, (3) there are better and worse ways of trying to deal with them (Callahan & Bok, 1980, p. 62).

We recommend that certain courses in each discipline be marked for ethical value study emphasis. (This is similar as to creating writing-intensive courses and encouraging writing across the curriculum.) We have no objection to a specific, required course in each discipline designed specifically to introduce ethical value considerations. It should not be a substitute for other courses in the curriculum where emphasis is placed in ethical value development applications. In fact, we would argue for regular analysis of course goals with an eye to determining what values, if any, are implicit in the study of a given aspect of the discipline.

We believe that every university faculty member should receive training in values-added instruction. A philosopher without exposure to the issues in communication would not be a better choice as an instructor than a communication professor with sensitivity to culturally-diverse values education. Team teaching offers some possibilities.

Ethical evaluation is challenging. Students' arguments can be examined

as they discuss and debate. Papers that call for value analysis offer another avenue to see if ethical approaches are being articulated. Identification of ethical values and the consequences of choices are important markers of values-added instruction effectiveness.

One interesting way to teach ethical value education may well be through case studies, writing and speaking assignments, or discussion questions. In Appendix A, we supply several possible assignments fertile for provoking students thinking about ethical issues. Short of a proactive effort to address this serious void in teaching ethics across the curriculum Pogo's observation may well be too close to reality when he said, "We have met the enemy and they is us."

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Appendix A

Possible Assignments

1. Consider the Iraq crisis in the Persian Gulf. Make a case for United States involvement including military action to liberate Kuwait. Alternately, argue the same situation considering that Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have no known oil reserves. How would the arguments be different? Is American self interest an ethical issue? Discuss why or why not.
2. Critique increasing gasoline prices for fuel already in service station tanks prior to the Persian Gulf crisis. Examine the same issue assuming that you are a service station owner facing greatly increased costs for fuel that you have just ordered. What ethical issues are involved?
3. Argue for mandatory curbside separation of waste products -- aluminum, glass, tin, plastic, and regular trash -- for pick up and recycling. Conversely, argue for allowing "market forces" to determine the method(s) of solid waste disposal. What ethical positions are involved?
4. Advocate ending economic aid to Brazil until they stop subsidizing rain forest removal which allegedly disturbs world-wide rain cycles. Alternatively, argue from the Brazilian viewpoint the need for economic development and the knowledge that American acid rain deposits fall on Canadian soil, trees, and lakes.
5. Argue for withholding facts about a chemical spill on a military complex near a residential area to prevent panic and protect property values. Alternately, argue for full disclosure of facts as the only credible way to treat citizens in such situations. What are the ethical values involved?